

## MEDIA RELEASE

12/12/2021

[starts]

### Leadership required to reduce alcohol harms

The Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) is increasingly concerned by the surge in alcohol related harm which has been generated by the pandemic and the implied support for increased consumption by the State Government.

Victoria has been soaking in alcohol throughout the pandemic, with a surge in sales, consumption and harms.

During this time, surprisingly consumption has been encouraged, and as observed by the Victorian Government's funding a campaign to encourage alcohol consumption as noted in Saturday's release '**Celebrate Festive Season In Style: Time To 'Drink Victorian'**'<sup>1</sup>.

However the Government is not alone in this. In October, the Victorian opposition put out a release '**Victorian's first drink back on the house**'<sup>2</sup> seeking to provide 1 million free drinks under a \$10M policy to stimulate the industry.

Mr Sam Biondo, EO of VAADA, says, '70% of drug treatment agencies have reported an increase in the prevalence and severity of alcohol related presentations to drug treatment agencies with alcohol being the most common substance of concern among treatment agencies nationally. Our recent survey of sector waitlists indicates that there are 3,599 Victorians waiting for treatment on any given day'

'In 2020, Victoria experienced the highest number of women fatally overdosing with alcohol'.

'Alcohol contributes to 4.5% of the overall health burden across the country, which is of acute concern while governments seek to free up capacity within the health system to contend with the pandemic.'

According to the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (Fare), during the pandemic, alcohol sales increased by 27% when compared with 2019 figures amounting to an extra \$15M worth of alcohol flowing into Victorian homes.<sup>3</sup>

'The government and opposition are seeking to stimulate an already overheated industry which is profiting from a surge of harm across the community rather than seeking to reduce alcohol related harm, through their public messaging.

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<sup>1</sup> Victorian Government. 2021. Celebrate festive season in style: Time to 'Drink Victorian'. 11 December. <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/celebrate-festive-season-style-time-drink-victorian>

<sup>2</sup> Liberal Victoria. 2021. Victoria's first drink back on the house. 24 October. <https://vic.liberal.org.au/state/2021-10-24-victorians-first-drink-back-on-the-house>

<sup>3</sup> Fare 2021. An extra \$15 million in alcohol sales flowing into Victorian homes each week. 8 July. <https://fare.org.au/an-extra-15-million-in-alcohol-sales-flowing-into-victorian-homes-each-week/>

They should prioritise greater regulation of the industry as well as increase the capacity of drug treatment agencies in response to COVID-19 exacerbated alcohol treatment demand.'

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*VAADA is the peak body that represents over 80 Alcohol and other Drug services across Victoria. On a daily basis these services are dealing with the effects of harmful alcohol and other drug consumption.*

**For more information or to arrange an interview please contact Sam Biondo 0414 974 121 for comment or if unavailable, David Taylor on 0413 914 206.**